

**Rwanda 1994: Genocide in the "Land of a Thousand Hills"**, by Benjamin Neuberger, Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2017, xiii + 217pp., £14.30 (pbk) and £64.93. (hardcover) ISBN 978-1-78179-580-4.

The year 2019 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide that took place in Rwanda, the land of a thousand hills, between April and July 1994. Out a population of approximately seven million people, almost one million people were killed. The perpetrators were extremist members of the ethnic majority Hutu group and the targets were members of the ethnic minority Tutsi. Moderate Hutus and members of the third ethnic group, the Twa, were also killed amidst widespread violence.

Neuberger's *Rwanda 1994: Genocide in the "Land of a Thousand Hills"* offers a well-written account of the genocide, its history, dynamics and legacy. The book sits among an expanding body of scholarly publications in the new field of Rwanda Studies. In the aftermath of the genocide that shocked the international imagination, academics felt the need to comprehend the nature of widespread and intimate violence that took place in the previously unknown small country located in the Great Lakes region of Eastern Africa. The result was the emergence of new area of studies to which Neuberger contributes from a political science perspective.

*Rwanda 1994* is organised in seven chapters, which overall reproduce the familiar structure found in other generalist publications on the Rwandan genocide. The

manuscript begins by tracing the country's history that led to ethnic violence, continues by detailing the mechanisms for the implementation of violence and concludes with an assessment of the legacy of the genocide in post-genocide Rwanda. The book is a useful educational tool to help students and teaching staff to discuss genocides. Each chapter contains questions to help readers to reflect on key issues as well as tables and figures to visually simplify statistical information and map social changes. The inclusion of photographs, drawings and poems makes it an accessible reading.

As the first chapter introduces Rwanda's historical and political background from pre-colonial times to recent history, the second one focuses on the 1990-1994 period characterised by the transition from mono-partism to multi-partism, the intensification of political power struggles, and the consolidation of a genocide ideology. The strengthening of the Rwandan Patriotic Front formed by Tutsi refugees in exile, who won the war and ended the genocide, is also documented. Neuberger breaks down the homogeneity of victims and perpetrators. He identifies the various categories of government, army and civilian killers and those of the victims, the Tutsi elites, the masses and the moderate Hutus. The strategy and 'methodology' of the killings is explained and documented through the use of testimonies.

Shifting from the national to the international dimensions of the genocide, chapter Three considers the involvement or (deliberate) non-involvement of France, the U.S., Belgium, the UN and the other African countries. It is refreshing to read a section on the

varying positions of the other African countries, which are generally neglected in scholarly discussions on the role of the international community during the genocide. By placing side by side a range of social actors, the chapter offers a broad representation of the connections between national and international forces. Could the world have prevented the genocide? The concluding question raised in the chapter is answered in the affirmative, acting as a reminder of the incapacity or unwillingness to save lives. Various mechanisms could have been put in place when the first signs of planned violence emerged that would have easily prevented the escalation of mass violence.

Chapter Four diverges from the chronological narrative to compare the genocide that took place in Rwanda with other genocides of the twentieth century. The comparative perspective is particularly illuminating of the political and scholarly endeavours to memorialise this genocide. Since the end of the atrocities, the Tutsi dominated Rwandan Government has kept the memory of the genocide alive and formalised the remembrance of the officially renamed “Genocide Against the Tutsi”. In 2004, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide, the Kigali Genocide Memorial was inaugurated in the capital Kigali. One of the objectives of the memorial site is to position this African genocide on an equal stance to that of other (European) genocides. To this purpose, the Kigali Genocide Memorial site contains an exhibition area dedicated to world genocides. The exhibition space is found side by the side the main area that documents the genocide that took place inside Rwanda and nearby a room specifically dedicated to the

memory of the children who were killed.

Similarly, Neuberger positions the Rwandan genocide alongside two other major instances of mass violence, the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. The comparison is effective in drawing parallels between the Rwandan genocide with other genocides in the twentieth century. Neuberger identifies similarities across the three cases such as the fact that the victims were members of minority groups; the genocide took place during war; and the other was represented as a foreigner. A number of significant dissimilarities were also recognized between the case of Rwanda and the Jewish and Armenian genocides. Differences include the frenzied rate of the killings in Rwanda, the rudimentary equipment employed to carry out the killings, international awareness of the preparations for the killings, and its preventability.

Shifting the focus from the international back to the national dimensions, chapter Five identifies the various causes of the Rwandan genocide, ranging from racist ideology, economic factors, democratisation, war and the relationship with the neighbouring Burundi. A discussion on the pressing theme of post-conflict justice follows in chapter Six, which documents the mechanisms for the trial and punishment of the murderers by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, and through the traditional judicial system called *gacaca*, a type of grass-root communal justice that belonged to Rwandan tradition. Lastly, a sketch of the “New Rwanda” is outlined in the concluding chapter. It is worth noting that the term “New Rwanda” is used in public

discourses to reflect the profound rapture caused by the genocide and the marked transformations undergone by Rwandan society in the post-genocide period during which a “new” country, a “new” nation and a “new” people were forged.

Amidst a growing literature on the genocide, *Rwanda 1994: Genocide in the "Land of a Thousand Hills"* offers an accessible introduction to the genocide and an informative description of the country's recent history. Its articulate and lucid style makes for an accessible reading for undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as scholars interested in ethnic and race relations; conflict and genocide studies; and Rwandan and African Studies, among others.

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